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ABSTRACT

Some intervention programs have responded to the magnitude of the difficulties that career transitions present for adults. This digest examines one program which aims to improve the career adaptability of adults seeking employment. The interventional procedures outlined here are intended to accelerate vocational development by helping people complete each of their career transitions as successfully as possible. The concept of career transition adopted here is related mainly to a psycho-sociological approach and is based on four principles: (1) the transitional process is cyclical and continuous; (2) individuals must renew their relationship with the world in order to control their transitions adequately; (3) renewal of the relationship with the world of work, requires that four distinct interactional dimensions involving the person and the environment be kept in mind; and (4) redefinition of the person's relationship with the world of work is effected through a cycle of revision comprising four stages. In order to simplify this cycle of revision and thus increase the chances for successful career transitions, this program advances the idea that there must be four different educational strategies corresponding to each of the modes of Person-Environment interactions. Each of these strategies--analogical, relational, anticipation, and transactional--address specific skills and issues. (RJM)

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by Danielle Riverin-Simard

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON Counseling And Student Services

ERIC DIGEST

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Career Transitions

Danielle Riverin-Simard

Overview

Career transitions are the lot of many in our constantly changing, postindustrial societies. In these last years of the twentieth century, however, the transitions which are most critical in scope and in their negative social repercussions most frequently appear in transitions to work. They reflect young people in search of employment and adults who, because of single or mass layoffs, face the necessity of negotiating their reinsertion into the workforce.

Our preceding analyses (Riverin-Simard, 1988; 1991) showed us it would be imperative to undertake the writing of a new concept of career transitions. These analyses highlighted the different phases of professional life through which adults pass over the years, described in terms of such classic variables as intracultural (socioeconomic status) and intrapersonal (types of vocational personality). These phases, with their accompanying periods of rethinking which are often stressful and sometimes painful, are, in fact, career transitions which have to be worked through. That is why we offered a new concept which incorporates intervention procedures and which are likely to ease transition through these different phases experienced by most adults (Riverin-Simard, in press). The intervention procedures are intended to accelerate vocational development by helping people complete each of their career transitions as successfully as possible, including the transitions accompanying entry and reentry into the labor market.

New Concept Of Career Transition

Our concept of career transition is related mainly to a psycho-sociological approach. More exactly, it is based on four principles, which are original and which result from our research over the last 8 years.

1. The transitional process is cyclical and continuous. This statement is akin to conceptions such as Nicholson and West (1989), in which the final stage of the model is, in fact, the beginning of the next transitional cycle. This idea of recursiveness, juxtaposed with the transitional phenomenon, appears in our previous work (Riverin-Simard, 1988; 1991), where it was observed that the events resulting in career transitions are not exceptional. These events even appear to cause an uninterrupted sequence of transitions and reconsiderations. This is an inter-transitional cycle which itself, as we will see later on, gives rise to an intra-transitional cycle.

2. Individuals must renew their relationship with the world in order to control their transitions adequately. This principle explains the concept of transition in our present program. This obligation to redefine or rebuild a new form of relationship with one's environment is also discussed by other authors (e.g., Schlossberg, 1991). Since the two poles (person and environment) are subject to constant change, it is obvious that the modes of interaction between the two also will have to be defined cyclically and continuously. Thus, career transitions, whatever their nature may be, are always defined as re-examinations of new modes of relationship to be maintained with the world of work. Therefore, they implicitly necessitate a complete revision of the interaction between the individual person P and the environment E. Consequently, as soon as an event is seen to be a cause of disturbance, individuals must remodel their interaction with the environment if they are to accomplish their career transitions successfully.

3. Renewal of the relationship with the world of work, allowing for its complexity and its crucial importance, requires that four distinct interactional P-E dimensions be kept in mind. This principle is original, and results from our work. Stokols and Altman (1987), after emphasizing that few authors have studied in depth the philosophical and metatheoretical substrata on which the different concepts of P-E interaction are founded, propose a terminology for describing four types of interaction. To our knowledge, no author has yet applied these different modes of P-E interaction to career transition. Our new program, based on the work of Altman and Rogoff (1987), stresses the fact that, if individuals are to succeed in each of their career transitions, they must renew their interaction with the environment in terms of the four dimensions: analogical, relational, organismic, and transactional.

(a) *Analogical*. Faced with a transition the person, P, must become acquainted with new components of the self and the environment and with the possibilities of pairing these recent redefinitions of the P and the E;

(b) *Relational*. People must be able to understand the reciprocal effects of these two modified entities;

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(c) *Organismic*. People must also reposition themselves while keeping in mind the future reorientation of their vocational life and the renewal of the trajectory of the labor market;

(d) *Transactional*. The person, P, must learn once more how to juggle all the elements: the unknown, globality (multi-referential aspect), and situational, in which all the main elements (the P, the E, and also the context C and the precise moment of interaction T) combine to form, and continually recreate, particular situations.

4. Redefinition of the person's relationship with the world of work is effected through a cycle of revision comprising four stages which match the four modes of P-E interaction: analogical, relational, organismic and transactional. This original principle in the conception of transition is at the foundation of our present program of assistance. The four principles apply to the process of analyzing the elements in the transition, seeing how they are related, preparing to make the transition, achieving stability, and learning how to balance (juggle) all the factors involved. This is the intertransitional process of making a transition from one situation to another. However, the same factors apply to dealing with a single transition; thus the four dimensions also apply in an intra-transitional fashion. The inter-transitional process was described above. The intra- transitional process, and the interventions that are used in making successful transitions, are outlined below.

New Concept Of Intervention

In order to simplify this cycle of revision and thus increase the chances for successful career transitions, the program of assistance in our world advances the novel postulate that there must be four different educational strategies corresponding, respectively, to each of the four distinct modes of P-E interaction.

1. *Analogical* is realized through informational objectives regarding the P-E similarities or differences.

2. *Relational* focuses primarily on a double objective of raising awareness of the reciprocal P-E actions, and developing interpersonal skills such as persuasion and inter-influence.

3. *Anticipation*, linked with the organismic approach, is associated with the development of the skills in projecting the P and the E into future perspectives and in perceiving the complex interinfluences between these two series of realities, given that they are each located within a particular future orientation.

4. *Transactional* focuses on globalization enables one to read a situation globally and to detect the singular character of that situation. These objectives of the globalization strategy include an education in tolerating the ambiguity created by the unknown and unforeseeable character, which is inevitably linked with the uniqueness of each situation in career transitions.

Conclusion

Some intervention programs have been created in response to the magnitude of the difficulties that career transitions present for adults. From this perspective, we have considered an innovative program which aims to improve the career adaptability of adults seeking employment. In order to do this, we have based our work on the process of person-environnement interaction (P-E), a process that has been recognized as central to the main theories of vocational choice and development. We have subsequently refined this "P-E" interaction by distinguishing four facets that we label analogic, relational, organismic, and transactional. This latter contribution is one of the principal elements which assures the innovation of our program.

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